

# Essence of Emotional Maturity

## **Essence of Humanity**

The idea that tranquility eliminates emotions may come as a surprise to those who believe that emotion is the essence of humanity. In Eastern Asia belief it is quite the contrary; emotion is seen as the animal nature within man. What is special about being human is the ability to remain tranquil and act rationally. A Sanskrit poet expresses this idea thus:

Eating, sleeping, fear and sex  
Common are they to man and beast  
Thought complex is special to man  
When low in thought, man is a beast.

This idea is confirmed by modern biological research too. According to modern biology, the difference between the ape and the human being is that, the ape is passively reacting to the environment, whereas, man is able to delay the reaction, to get sufficient time, to decide which response to make in a given situation and then make the chosen response. Undoubtedly, “delaying the reaction,” means staying calm before “deciding the right response.” In other words, the human being has the potential to stay calm and think rationally, where as the other animals are incapable of doing so, as they get excited easily. Yet how many human beings are really capable of acting rationally when emotionally excited?

Normally people are not always calm and rational, and it is this “normal” state of excitability and lack of emotional control that we often mistake for the essence of human nature. The Buddha points out that this ability to remain calm is only a human potential to be developed. This means, true humanity is an unrealized potential. We are not fully human until we have learned to be calm and rational. Eric Fromm, in his book, Psychoanalysis and religion draws attention to this fact. This calmness and rationality is also the essence of emotional maturity. The adult is generally calmer than the child.

The practice of the Buddhist life, in essence, is the cultivation of this human potential and the gaining of emotional maturity. The end result of the Buddhist practice is to overcome our animal nature, and to enter the fully human state. In other words, man becomes fully human by living in the way taught by the Buddha. Although this fully human state is “not quite a normal one,” it cannot be called “abnormal.” Instead, the Buddha described it as “supernormal” (*ariya*) or “divine” (*brahma cariya*). This is the meaning of “divinity” in Buddhism. The aim of Buddhism is to bring the human being to a “supernormal” or “divine” state. This transcendence of the ordinary human state, is seen by the Buddha as the true meaning of “union with God,” spoken of in theistic religions.

To unite with God is to become God. This is why the Buddha and his perfected disciples are called “God Become” (*brahma bhuto*). It is a gross error to say that the Buddha is an ordinary human being. The Buddha is, by definition, one who has transcended the human state, in attaining the state of unshakable imperturbability, NIRVANA. He is also believed by “all Buddhists” (not only Mahayanists) to be Omniscient (*sabbannu*), Omnibenevolent (*mahakaruniko*), and spiritually perfect (*arahan*).

It may be surprising to some scholars to find here that these attributes of the Buddha seem to be the same as that of God in theistic religions, except for one. The missing attribute is Omnipotence. In Buddhism, Omnipotence is attributed to Mara (*vasavatti mara*) the Devil, who is a personification of all that is evil in the world. Because the Buddha is supposed to have defeated Mara, the Buddha is also called the Dispeller of Mara (*maranudo*).

This puzzling situation could be interpreted by some as an attempt to deify the Buddha, as some scholars have already done. This is quite a misunderstanding. It is important to understand the Buddhist way of thinking fully, before one can draw such conclusions. What all this means is that Buddhism is not an atheistic religion, as it is popularly known. It only has a different way of looking at the concept of God. This different way is the humanistic way. Buddhism is neither theistic nor atheistic, but humanistic. Buddhism offers a humanistic definition of God.

“God,” for the Buddhist, is a human concept. This means that God did not make man in his own image, but manmade God in his own image. There is nothing wrong or funny about this. Man made God for a useful and worthy purpose. God is the human ideal of perfection that human beings conceive and struggle to realize through the practice of religion. It is very rarely that a person realizes this high ideal of perfection, but when a human being does realize this ideal, he is called an Awakened One (Buddha). In theistic religion, we hear of God becoming man, Christ – the anthropomorphic God. In the same vein, we hear in humanistic Buddhism of man becoming God – the “theopsychic” man, or “God-become” (*brahmabhuto*). All theistic religions talk about uniting with God. What is “uniting with God” other than “becoming God?” When one unites with God, one loses one's identity, just as the river that enters the ocean and loses its identity.

Religion, for the Buddhist, is not an institution that came down from Heaven to Earth, carrying the message of the Creator. It is an institution that has grown up on earth to satisfy a human need, to solve a human problem, which is the “problem of existence.” This problem of existence is that everyone who is born has to grow old and die. Everything we are attached to is subject to change and separation. All pleasure is impermanent. **In spite of this, all animals, plants, and human beings are struggling and competing to exist, they fight with one another to keep their temporary lives and to enjoy impermanent pleasure.** The purpose of all religions is to solve this problem of unhappiness and insecurity in life. This is why all religions seek eternal life and eternal happiness. Theistic religions pray to an Almighty God for help. Humanistic Buddhism takes refuge in the Wisdom of the Buddha who transcended all human weaknesses and became Divine.

The Buddha offered a solution to mankind. That is to fully understand this human predicament. In simple terms, it is to understand what is called life. What we call life is a dynamic biochemical process. Therefore life is an activity, not an entity that exists. Existence is a static concept, while life is a dynamic process of activity. Therefore life can continue as a process but cannot exist. Continuity is an ever-changing process like a flame. It can have a beginning and an end, but in between is change. It is this misunderstanding about life as existence that has created the problem.

Life is not as we want. We are born without knowing why. We don't know why we are born in a certain country, into a certain race, with a certain color, with certain bodily features, with certain mental features. Often we don't like the way we are born. We cannot do anything about it. After being born we grow up. Then we begin to grow old. We don't like to grow old, to fall sick or to die. We want to remain young always and live without sickness forever. How many people have enough money to buy anything they want? How many are really happy about their situation?

We all want to exist, but life is not an existence. **Life is like a wave. A wave is only a motion, not an existence.** If life is not an existence, we do not exist. If we don't exist, we do not grow old or die. Then why do we think we exist? Is it because of our emotions? Even if we are fully convinced rationally that we don't exist, we still feel we exist. **Existence is a feeling rather than a rational concept.**

Because of feelings we also identify ourselves with the body, the feelings, the sensations, the perceptions, and the consciousness itself. We personalize these parts of our experience. We regard them as "mine" or "myself." **Only when we are able to relax fully, and calmly depersonalize all experience, we will be free of the feeling of existence.** With that comes all our suffering, and the problem of existence to an end. This is the transcendence of ordinary human nature, or awakening from the dream of existence. Yet it is easily said than done. This needs much relaxation and calmness through meditation.